THE WATERS OF MARAH

[EXODUS xv. 23—25];

OR,

RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY,

WHY IT IS BITTER, AND HOW IT MAY BE MADE SWEET.

An Address to the Students

OF

MANCHESTER COLLEGE,

OXFORD,

AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, 1894-95,

BY

CHARLES HARGROVE, M.A.,

VISITOR.

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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ADDRESS.

THEOLOGY is the science of God. Religion is the recognition by man of the relationship between God and the individual soul. What, then, has either Theology or Religion to do with controversy? Men dispute for those things of which there is not enough for all, for wealth, for power, for ease; things which in their very nature few can enjoy. They do not contend for air, unless shut up in some Black Hole of Calcutta, nor for light, unless they be by constraint deprived of it. Of these let each have all he can get, no largest appropriation by one man will despoil another of his share. And such is God to man. El Shaddai, the Hebrews called Him, and the Rabbis interpret it, "He in whose Godhead is sufficiency for the whole creation," which may be indefensible as etymology but is sound philosophy nevertheless; for is there not in the Infinite more than enough for all possible finite need?

It might seem, therefore, that the study of Theology should be of all others the most peaceful, undisturbed by the clamour of tongues busied in the interested discussion of human affairs; and still more should Religion be the private concern of each soul, a sanctuary into which no outsider may intrude to criticise or applaud, as the refuge of some quiet church in a great city, within whose walls the street noises penetrate, hushed to an indistinct monotone which seems like a confession of unimportance.

Doubtless in our thoughts and worship of God we are deluded and mistaken and ignorant, each in his own way; we see none of us but in part, one so much, and another so much less or more; one indistinctly, and another a little more or less distinctly; but what has another's sight to do with me? or how should his seeing more affect me, or my seeing less or differently offend him? They

come out into the garden's sunshine, the old pensioners of the hospital,—this one blear-eyed and this one short-sighted, and this colour-blind and this blind altogether—what matters it to each about his neighbour if they all enjoy together the fullest share of light and warmth of which they are capable?

So Religion brings us into the sunshine of God's Presence, and of His Fullness we are filled according to our several capacities. Let us gaze and adore and love, and, if we turn to think of the neighbour who shares in larger or smaller measure than we, let it be only to discover how we may be helped by him to clearer vision, or how we may be haply privileged to bring help to him.

Yes, surely, the things of God should be studied and followed in peace. Dutiful sons will not quarrel for reverence of their father's presence, and how should we dare uplift our voices or speak angry or contemptuous words of one another when in the very Presence of God?

But alas! whatever be the force or the fallacy of these considerations, it is certain that they have never prevailed among theologians or religious people. On the contrary, so invariably is religion accompanied with contention, that the word "controversy," which means no more than putting the opposite side of any question, has come to bear a religious meaning, and is only applied to other matters in dispute among us, as it were by permission and with explanation. So if we speak of "methods of controversy," or "evils of controversy," everyone understands that it is questions of religion we refer to, otherwise we should expressly qualify the word, and say, of political, or scientific, or social controversy.

But not only has religion appropriated the word to its own peculiar use, it has moreover cast a sinister shadow upon it, so that it has ever since come to be associated with bitterness, strife, unfairness, vanity, trifling.

"Some controverters in divinity," writes Ben Jonson—and mark how he restricts his censure to the field of religious controversy—"are like swaggerers in a tavern, that catch that which stands next them, the candlestick or pots; turn everything into a weapon; oftimes fight blindfold, and both beat the air. The one milks a he-goat, the other holds a sieve under. Their arguments are as liquor spilt upon a table, which with your finger you may drain as you will. Such controversies (carried with more labour than profit) are odious; where most times the truth is lost in the midst, or left untouched. And the fruit of their fight is, that they spit one upon another and are both defiled."*

Who that has had experience of controversy, ancient or modern, will not be forced with shame to admit the truth of the dramatist's observations? We, avowed students and professors of the Christian religion, whose part it should be to set example to others of modesty, of fairness towards opponents, of loyalty to truth, we, taken as a whole, are we not notorious for our quarrels, conducted with such intemperance and uncharitableness as astonishes or disgusts the world?

Or what better evidence could we have of this than the following passage, which I extract from a good man's story of a good man's life? Speaking of the Colenso controversy and Bishop Harold Browne's contribution to it in his "Five Lectures," Dean Kitchin writes †—"Professor Browne throughout deals with the subject in a way which made him *a model controversialist.*" What I conceive to be the character of a model controversialist I shall have to say presently, but, meanwhile, hear this definition by negatives: "There may be sadness in his tone—there is no bitterness; *he does not try to blacken his adversary's character, to impute to him evil motives, to heap on him detestable epithets.*" And the Dean confirms these remarks by quoting from the Bishop's

* Ben Jonson. "Discoveries."

† "Life of Bishop Browne," p. 218.

own preface these words: "I trust, I have nowhere expressed myself with *the bitterness and insolence of controversy.*"

Now it is assuredly no fault in either Bishop or biographer that they show themselves conscious of the evil, and both keep themselves clear of any complicity in it. But how great and universal must be the fault of controversialists when it can be made a merit in one of them that he has not been bitter, or insolent, or calumnious, or grossly unjust towards his opponent! And how low must be the ideal of even the best among them when mere abstinence from such vices suffices, in his judgment, to constitute a model. It seems, indeed, quite in place, this remark, in the life of a defender of orthodox Christianity; but I think it could hardly fail to attract attention and excite hostile comment if it were found in the story of Charles Darwin, or even of Charles Bradlaugh. Certain is it that from the scientific, nay, even from the heterodox controversialist, virtues are expected which are regarded as exceptional and worthy of admiration in the defender of the accepted faith.

I have often been struck with the naïve admission of this superiority of the unbeliever in courtesy and openness of mind which Justin the Martyr makes in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew—perhaps the first of the countless works of controversy which have helped or hindered the Christian cause. Justin is not only very tiresome—a fault which he shares, I am afraid, with the multitude of us who argue—but he is intolerant and rude and libellous.

The day is advancing, and Trypho is fain to get on with the argument, but most good humouredly submits to superfluous proofs of a point on which he has declared himself satisfied. "Do as seems good to you," he says, one fancies with a sigh, and adds, surely with more politeness than truthfulness, "for I shall be thoroughly pleased" (ch. 57). But he is presently reproved for being "quarrelsome and light-minded" (c. 64), and "fond of

strife" (c. 67), though his share of the Dialogue, as compared to Justin's, is as "one half-pennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack." Further on, when Justin excuses himself for repeating what he had before said, we can almost believe that we have the very words of this long-suffering, much-maligned, magnanimous opponent; "brief and concise," Justin has the audacity to call his own argument: so much Trypho really cannot admit, but "you do well," he says, "and though you repeat the same things at considerable length, be assured that I and my companions listen with pleasure" (c. 118). This is after the false accusation brought against them of mutilating the Scriptures which they confessed to be God's own word (chs. 72, &c.); there follow presently the customary objurgations,—they are "foolish and hard-hearted," "crafty and unscrupulous, wise only to do evil, utterly incompetent to know the counsel of God" (c. 123).

So the long discourse wears on from morning till the sun is near its setting (c. 137), and always it is the Jew who has the advantage in conduct; he is willing to hear, and ready to be convinced, and grateful for any new light, and forgetful of harsh accusations, and indulgent even of intolerance.

I adduce this specimen of primitive Christian controversy, not because it is worse than other innumerable works which have come after it, but because it contains in embryo all the faults which were presently developed, and which have grown and thriven among controversialists even to our day.

The first, and parent of innumerable evils, is the habit common to them all of identifying their personal belief with absolute truth—the conviction, unassailable by argument, that the cause of which they have constituted themselves the champions is not their own, but the cause of God, and they only advocates on his behalf.

This conviction each one deems to be in himself a merit and a duty, and he exercises and fortifies himself in it, as he would

do in courage or patience or any recognised virtue in which he was desirous of perfecting himself. In his opponents, compelled by the logic of necessity, he must treat this very same feeling of certainty as a delusion of the devil, or malignant obstinacy, or at the best the outcome of crass stupidity.

Oh, what a spectacle must it be to higher and therefore humbler intelligences, if such there be who interest themselves in the affairs of men, to mark how innumerable are our differences of opinion and how absolute the confidence with which we each hold to our own! How not only the great and ancient Churches, but

> "every splintered fragment of a sect
> Will clamour *I* am on the perfect way,
> All else is to perdition." *

Nay, there are those who stand apart from every society of their fellows and dare, in the loneliness of their tiny individuality, to face the whole world, and assure mankind that all but themselves are in the wrong, their last-formed opinions the final revelation of God!

It is this conviction, this absolute certainty of being in the right, which in old times made men persecutors or often martyrs, one or the other, just according to the circumstances in which they found themselves; for we are obliged to confess that too often there was the same spirit of intolerance in butcher and victim, and they had changed sides with a change of power.

I doubt not, indeed, but that many an honest and devout inquisitor had been full ready to endure the torture to which he subjected his heretical brother, if what he called Heresy had triumphed and it was himself who had been called upon to recant. The stake to which he doomed others he would have embraced himself if the same choice which he offered had been left to him, his faith or the fire. In these milder, perhaps more

* Tennyson, Akbar's Dream.

sensible, days men do not dare to so completely identify their petty personality with the Infinite God, as to count it a crime to doubt their word, and punish with torture and death those who do not agree with them; but the same spirit persists and is the fruitful source of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness among Christian people: they have learnt to *tolerate* differences of opinion, they are yet far from having learnt mutual forbearance and respect.

"I *know*," says each one, "know moreover not of my private research as I do other things about which there is no dispute or which by dispute may be settled, but *know* in such way that knowledge becomes identical with duty, inasmuch as it is not mine but God's light from heaven illuminating my mind that I may illumine others. Do others make a like claim for their religious beliefs? Oh, the folly and the pity of it, blindness which calls darkness light and light darkness!"

Yet, that this certainty is absurd, each one confirms, in every case except his own, "I could not but smile," writes Jeremy Taylor, "at those jolly friars; two Franciscans offered themselves to the fire, to prove Savonarola to be a heretic; but a certain Dominican offered himself to the fire to prove that Savonarola had true revelations and was no heretic; in the meantime Savonarola preached, but made no such confident offer, nor durst he venture at that new kind of fire ordeal; and put the case all four had passed through the fire, what would that have proved? Had he been a heretic more or less, for the confidence of these zealous idiots? If we mark it a great many arguments, whereon many sects rely, are no better probation than this comes to. *Confidence* is the first, the second, and the third part of a very great many of their propositions." And with a largeness of view beyond his age and beyond his ordinary self he says, "To my understanding, it is a plain art and design of the devil to make us so in love with our own opinions as to call them faith and religion, that we

may be proud in our understanding . . . . . I am certain that a drunkard is as contrary to God as a heretic; and I am also sure that I know what drunkenness is; but I am not *sure* that such an opinion is heresy; neither would other men be so sure if they did consider it aright and observe the infinite deceptions and causes of deceptions in wise men, and in most things, and in all doubtful questions; and that they did not mistake confidence for certainty." *

But the good Bishop, when once he has determined what things are not doubtful, can be as confident as any, and lays it down unhesitatingly that, "if by an heresy we mean that which is against an article of the creed, I grant it to be a very grievous crime, a calling God's veracity into question, a destruction also of good life. Heresy such as this is a vice and the person criminal, and it is worse than adultery or murder, and let men be as zealous against it as they can." How many liberal-minded men will make just such reservations, yet in these their reservations is contained justification of all intolerance and persecution; if to question *my* creed is to deny *God's* veracity and destroy the foundation of good life, the difference between Roman, Anglican, and Presbyterian becomes one of articles more or fewer, and they are all agreed on the principle by which they are each in turn condemned, while together they condemn those who cannot accept the more or less on which they happen to agree.

And this blind confidence, not only does it embitter the controversialist against all opponents and inevitably lead to measures, more drastic than words, if opportunity favour him; but, moreover, it deprives controversy of its only real value as an honest statement of the grounds on which such confidence is grounded.

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* Jeremy Taylor, "Liberty of Prophesying," Epistle Dedicatory.

In his "Ductor Dubitantium,"* Jeremy Taylor puts the question, "Whether it be lawful and ingenuous to go about to persuade a man to the belief of a true proposition" (*i.e.*, a proposition which I believe to be true) "by arguments which he himself is not persuaded and which he believes are not sufficient." A recent writer sums up the Bishop's solution of this doubt in the words "in controversy it is allowable to employ arguments and authorities we know to be invalid." † This is an honest layman's blunt way of putting the ecclesiastic's guarded admissions, and goes, I think, a little beyond what the text admits; yet who will deny that such a rule, untruthful and disingenuous as it appears so stated, is in practice generally accepted and acted on? For the Bishop's decision it will be enough for my purpose to quote

§ 9. "If a man suppose his arguments sufficient and competent to persuade, though they be neither fitting to persuade, nor at all sufficient, he may yet lawfully use them."

§ 10. "In the persuasion of a truth, it is lawful to use such arguments whose strength is wholly made prevailing by the weakness of him that is to be persuaded."

Which principles, if a controversialist accepts, you shall never know whether any statement or argument of his be such as he himself approves, or whether it be made only because he deems his reader weak or ignorant enough to be satisfied with it. Such doctrine will seem, even to many who unconsciously act upon it, an offence against morals; but I know, from manifold experience, that when a man, however upright and honest he may otherwise be, is convinced of what he calls "the truth," from some private reason of strong prejudice or deep feeling, he is not likely to be scrupulous in the arguments which he employs to defend it before the world. They will seem to him as buttresses which a builder rears against a tower of whose stability he is absolutely

* Book II., ch. II., Rule VI., § 4.

† Chambers' Encyclopædia, ed. 1892, Jeremy Taylor.

certain: they may be desirable, perhaps, from the architect's point of view, in order to make upon the spectator who cannot see the thickness of the walls and depth of foundation, the impression of a stability which is really quite independent of them; but to require of the builder to put only his best work into these same buttresses, to build them as firm and solid at if they did in fact keep the tower standing, is to ask of him a scrupulous truthfulness of work which is beyond ordinary human nature. So it is with everyone who enters upon an argument, with the conviction that he is right, and the determination to hold to his conviction; he will almost inevitably be concerned, not to seek truly and state frankly what there is to urge on behalf of his opinion, but to seek the arguments which will be of most avail against his opponent, and to state them as effectively as he can.

So to return to Justin, it is clear from the first that he believes that Jesus is the Christ of God, for quite other reasons than those by which he tries to convince Trypho. He tells us himself how he came to be a Christian; true, the old man whom he met by the sea shore told him about the prophets and their witness to Jesus, but this was not the source of his faith. For "he went away," Justin says, "and I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul, and a love of the prophets and those men who are friends of Christ possessed me; and, whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy only to be safe and profitable." It was, in fact, a case of sudden conversion, as our Methodist friends would call it. "Pray," the old man had bidden him, "that the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood save by him to whom God and his Christ have imparted wisdom." This is his own account, and I do not mean to discuss the nature and value of such—supernatural enlightenment, shall I call it? the like of which has been at the basis of every successful religious movement. I now only point out that,

as the history of such movements proves, it is not infallible, and that in controversy it is a disturbing element which makes the argument unreal and untrustworthy.

A recent case of the same kind is Cardinal Newman's Defence of Ecclesiastical Miracles. This essay Dr. Abbot has attacked with a persistence and vehemence, that we who value his learning and ability could wish had been devoted to some more profitable cause. In two considerable volumes Dr. Abbot examines and cross-examines both the Cardinal himself and the witnesses whom he called on his behalf, and the conclusion arrived at, and confirmed with a superfluity of proof is, that Dr. Newman has not been at all scrupulous as to his authorities or his arguments, but has sought to make the best case he could for the miracles in question. Quite so, and this was no doubt just what he set out to do. He believed in these miracles himself because it was the part of a pious (Anglo or Roman) Catholic to do so, because they were probable occurrences such as were to be looked for in the story of a Church which was founded and nurtured and maintained amid supernatural surroundings. He wished to bring others to agree that they were not unreasonable or without evidence on their behalf, and he accumulated whatever he judged could be turned to good account, satisfied that the conclusion was sound, and perhaps equally satisfied that there was no evidence sufficient to convince those who had not "the will to believe." Dr. Abbot writes as a seeker after the truth—did such miracles really take place or not? Newman wrote as an advocate avowedly in order to persuade men of that of which he was fully persuaded himself. So as often happens, the controversialists do not come near each other, nor will anyone who believes in ecclesiastical miracles cease to believe because it has been amply proved that Dr. Newman's arguments on their behalf were not impartially stated.

This, then, is the first fault, from which you will hardly find

any controversy free. On one side or the other, generally on both, is a conviction superior to reason, which not only renders all the controversy useless, so far, at least, as the antagonists and their backers are concerned, but, moreover, vitiates the character of their arguments. If any stone is good enough to throw at a dog, so is any proof good enough for a heretic if only it is such as to impress him.

But it should be observed that this conviction is not necessarily a fault of the man, but only of the controversialist. Conviction of this kind is the foundation of character and the force of all great movements, but it is almost inevitably fatal to equal and profitable argument.

And of this first original sin of controversy comes the worse actual sin of injustice towards whoever does not share your conviction; an injustice which may limit itself to angry or contemptuous words, but which passes on to denial of good fellowship and excommunication, with its major and minor social penalties, and thence proceeds, if time and circumstances favour, to the uttermost extremes of intolerance and persecution.

"I am in the right, you are in the wrong. Truth is on my side, you are on the side of falsehood." With this usually the controversy begins, and is foredoomed to be ineffective just because it does so begin. But that is not all. Truth and falsehood are not only in things but in men, and there assume a moral complexion. It is hard to allow that a man who takes the side of the false against the true is a morally good man. He has the same opportunities as ourselves, the same faculties of judging; if he does not agree to what is to us so certain, there must be some moral obliquity which hinders him. Hence that bitterness of controversy—that trying "to blacken the character" of an opponent, "imputing evil motives, heaping on him detestable epithets," which seems so natural an outcome of controversy that it is made an extraordinary merit to be free of it. The man who

"doubts God's veracity," what can be said of him but that he is either insane or wicked? if he proves by his general conduct and by the ability with which he defends his opinions, that he is not the former, then he is indubitably the latter; his life free, it may be, from notorious and coarser sins, but, if so, all the more deeply depraved by the pride which cast Satan down from heaven.

So the more confident your assurance of being in the right, the more impossible will it become to you to be just towards those who do not agree with you. Once admit that your opponent is as intelligent, as good, as capable everyway as yourself, and you are bound to admit that he may be right and you wrong. Your self-confidence is ruined, your most cherished opinions cease to be to you "the truth."

Lastly, from this conviction preceding controversy comes that which is the disgrace of Theology as compared with science, that it makes little or no progress. The battle-field of controversy is one where nothing is ever settled, where no quarter is given, no decisive victory ever won, and no peace dreamt of except by extermination of one or other side. New subjects of dispute from time to time arise, but the old remain there to be brought forward again and again as occasion offers. The ground shifts occasionally, but the parties remain the same. Justin has not yet persuaded Trypho, nor has Origen effectively answered Celsus, nor Augustine prevailed against Pelagius, nor Athanasius silenced Arius. The controversialist accumulates causes of strife and hands them down to his successors, but he determines none.

And why? Partly, no doubt, because of the subject matter; we shall always disagree about things too high for us and past our finding out; but principally, and in regard to numerous questions, because the end of legitimate controversy has been forgotten or repudiated, and men have argued on from age to age, not to discover truth, but to substantiate their own opinions. And they have succeeded, all of them, to greater or less extent in doing that

which they were determined to do; they have persuaded themselves and persuaded others, many or few, that this opinion or that opinion was the truth of God; they have not done that which was alone worth doing, but which they did not try to do—they have not found what they did not seek, the Truth above all their opinions and in which all should be reconciled.

Let me repeat what I have said of the evils of controversy and the temptations which beset whoever is willingly or unwillingly engaged in it.

First and cause of all the rest is, the assurance of being in the right and the determination to stand by the side you have adopted, come what may. Second, is the seeking, not for solid reasons which really establish your opinion if such there are, but for proofs of any kind which will be effective in argument; concealing the weak places of your position and evidence which tends to the contrary;* and considering whatever is urged against you only as something to which you have to find an effective reply. Third, comes injustice towards those who are opposed to you, as if it was a moral wrong in others not to be of the same mind as your small individual self: hence, accusations of dishonesty, incapacity, blindness of heart and worse. And fourth, is indifference to the one end which justifies controversy,—the elucidation of truth, by comparision and opposition of ideas in men who are together seeking truth,—and, instead of this, substituting what can only tend to perpetuate error and strife—the determined defence by each one of his own prepossessions.

And how may we escape these snares of controversy and maintain inviolate our allegiance to Truth, which is not mine nor yours, but God's, of which all our little systems are but "broken lights," which it were blasphemy against the sun's glory to proclaim as his full noontide splendour?

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* So Donne remarked it in his day that—

"Controverters in voucht texts leave out
Shrewd words, which might against them cleare the doubt."—SATIRE II.

One way there is which commends itself to many a humble and devout worshipper, it is a controversial teetotalism, if I might so express it, the quiet resolve not to argue and not to listen to argument about matters which are the soul's own secret. And I cannot but think it generally a wise if not an heroic resolve. If a man finds in the form of faith in which he has grown up, or which circumstances have led him to adopt, the satisfaction of his spiritual needs and the grace needful to resist temptation, if he is untroubled by doubts, and conscious, perhaps, that he has not the means of dealing fairly with them if they should arise,—then, surely, it is his wisdom to bide where he finds blessing, and no one is justified in disturbing his peaceful possession.

But your vocation, my brothers, will not permit of your quiet enjoyment of a faith which it shall be enough for you to call your own. You are called not to devote yourselves to the service of a sanctuary, in which you shall offer morn and eve oblation of prayer and thanksgiving. You must needs go out into the world as professed teachers of religion, and you will be confronted by some who teach all otherwise to what you do, and by some who deny your teaching altogether. It may be that you will try to avoid argument as unprofitable; you may judge that to preach directly against the beliefs which many hold sacred is something like a desecration of the pulpit; and yet, live as peaceably as you may, you cannot avoid controversy. Mere courtesy will sometimes compel you to take notice of what is said against you and those who support you, and even if you resolutely decline all public encounter with such as oppose you, still the mere statement of your own conviction is one side of a controversy—the other side may be out of immediate hearing but is always there.

If I were to praise the staff of this College as model controversialists, I am not sure but that they would repudiate the title; and certainly I should not for a moment think of implying

to their credit that it has not been their habit "to try to blacken their adversaries' character, to impute to them evil motives, to heap on them detestable epithets." But I venture, with all respect, to say that controversy has been and is their chief life's work. They have been and are constantly engaged in setting forth the various conclusions at which learned men have arrived on the great questions of Theology and criticism, and it is their duty to give you their own decision and the reasons which have led them to it, and at the same time to reply to arguments on the other side. Is this not controversy because there is neither temper nor partiality nor hard words? And it is in such controversy we all, who are called to the ministry of religion, must take our part.

What rules shall we lay down then for ourselves, all the more carefully to be observed by us if others are tempted to neglect them? What precautions shall we take lest we be drawn unawares into the thick of the battle where none have time to think of what is to be lost or won, so busy are they in dealing with any weapon blows which may take effect on their opponents?

The first rule I would suggest is, to cultivate an habitual respect for individual liberty. "Conscience," wrote Dryden, in the days after he had become a Roman Catholic, and so learnt the value of religious toleration, "is the royalty and prerogative of every private man. He is absolute in his own breast, and accountable to no earthly power for that which passes only between God and him." * We have all accepted the principle now, and no party would tolerate interference of the State with any man's religion; but it is another thing to allow to a man liberty to think this or that, and to respect him in the exercise of it. We are all tempted to set up each himself as a standard whereby to judge other men. We have none of us the right to do so. It is intolerable folly and conceit that I should think the worse of

* Preface to "The Hind and Panther."

anyone because he differs from me in opinion. The same right which justifies me justifies him. I have my reasons which don't satisfy him; he has his which don't satisfy me. Whose is the blame? If there is any we must share it, for doubtless we ought to agree, and we don't.

The second rule is, to be always mindful of your own liability to be mistaken. "He that is the best amongst men," writes again Jeremy Taylor,* "certainly hath so much humility to think he may be easily deceived, and twenty to one but he is in something or other." But the odds the Bishop offers are too small, it is ten thousand to one that there is no individual among us but is more or less mistaken; indeed, it were safer to state it as a certainty, that however right a man be, he is not right in everything. And even where we are most confident of our conclusions, will any wise man be equally sure of the soundness of the arguments by which he supports them? I believe that God is, and that God is good. I cling to that faith with conviction and fervour, but I am none so sure that the reasons by which I support it are unassailable; I shall not venture to expect everybody to concede them, and I shall be very unreasonable if I get angry, or turn to abuse those who do not follow in the footsteps of my thought.

And lastly and chiefly—if we would avoid the besetting sins of controversy and get the benefit which may be derived from it, we must ever bear in mind, to use the words of the great Bishop Butler, that "Facts are what they are," and that our opinions, certainties, arguments, successful or unsuccessful disputes, in no wise alter them. Creeds don't make truths; they only state men's beliefs. The Fact doesn't depend upon evidence, nor is it established by subtlest argument. It is there, and it is our business not to prove it, but to discover it and humbly recognise it as such when found. The Almighty has no need of the help of our

* Of Heresy, § 12.

advocacy; He is what He is, ours to seek Him in awe and longing; and if haply we do but lay hold of the hem of the garment of cloud and light in which He girds Himself, to hold on with fear and delight.

Our own opinions we dare not force upon others as the final and absolute religion, the very Truth; but these methods of search, these we dare to set forth as right, and if we can humble our pride to follow in them, and if we can persuade our brethren who differ with us to seek truth in the same way, we need not doubt but that our controversies shall at last, after so many fruitless and bitter centuries, begin to be of profit to ourselves and to mankind, and hasten the day when "the knowledge of the Eternal shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Bitter indeed have been the wells from which the Christian Churches have ever drawn to give drink to those not of their own communion, embittered and poisoned with the roots of dogmatism, self-conceit, hatred and contempt, which we ourselves have mixed and mingled. The tree grows nigh whose infusion shall make them healthful and sweet;—it is Christian Charity, which THINKETH NO EVIL, even of those whose opinions seem the most perverse—which REJOICETH WITH THE TRUTH, even when the Truth convicts of error the most fondly-cherished beliefs; that charity which will heal our eyes so that we may see in those opposed to us, our brother men, men tempted and erring as ourselves, seeking as we seek, children of the same Father in heaven, whom none of us can know as He is, in whom all who love are one.